

The Sexual Exploitation of Young Sikhs in the UK

A new report sheds light on some of the consequences of turning a blind eye to allegations

by [Paula Boddington](#) (January 2019)



Much of the world now knows about the UK's shameful 'grooming gangs' (or more accurately, rape, pimping, and torture gangs), that have devastated the lives of thousands of young people, their families, and communities the length and breadth of Britain. In media reports, these gangs are often said to be targeting white girls (and some boys). Many have known for some time however that, in actual fact, victims can come from any community and from any ethnic or religious group. It

remains the case that not enough is known or understood about 'grooming gang' crimes, and how they fit into the broader patterns of the sadly widespread sexual abuse of children and vulnerable young adults.

A recent report published in November 2018, *The Religiously Aggravated Sexual Exploitation of Young Sikh Women Across the UK*, [\[1\]](#) (the RASE report) has brought to the attention of the media, both in Britain and elsewhere, allegations of widespread targeting by mostly Muslim Pakistani 'groomers' of Sikh girls and young women—and indeed, sometimes boys too. The report presents evidence that Sikhs have been victims of such crimes for nigh on fifty years, with court cases documented as long ago as 1961, and reports of abuse ongoing. The report alleges that Sikhs have been especially targeted because of their religion. It documents allegations that men have pretended to be Sikh in order to gain a girl's trust, and it argues that demographic and cultural factors made Sikhs a particular target of Pakistani Muslim predators.

The RASE report also claims that cultural and religious factors meant that the Sikh community has been repeatedly failed by the authorities, with their allegations of targeted abuse ignored or rejected. Why might this be the case? According to the report, there appear to be distinctive patterns to the abuse of young Sikhs, but for anyone who has looked in detail at this particular kind of crime within the wider community, certain aspects are all too recognizable. These similarities extend to the ways that allegations have been brushed aside, and to how the victims, their families, and communities, have been viewed.

The accounts of patterns of exploitation have a sickening ring

of familiarity. A Sikh woman whom I met at the launch of this report, Harminder Kaur, told me afterwards:

Ever since from my secondary school days, I have seen first-hand how the girls would be targeted by the Pakistani men outside the schools and younger inside the school. There were cases of men hanging around outside the school. As I had come from India and I was educated in the political history, I was more aware of the root causes. Also, there were only a handful of Pakistani girls coming into school in those days, as soon they were in their teens they were married off or sent to Pakistan, another reason that the target for boys and men were the Sikh and Hindu girls.

There were girls who fell into the vile trap that was laid to them by the Pakistanis too, they were innocent girls with dreams. Some girls felt undervalued and craved attention whilst others were from middle class families who became targets. I remember one girl who had come from East Africa and few weeks later, she went missing. It was quite common to hear that so-and-so's daughter had run away with a Muslim. To where no one knew.

There are particular aspects of the grooming of Sikhs that merit close scrutiny and understanding, including the claim that these crimes are religiously aggravated. The alleged patterns of abuse meted out upon Sikh victims shed further light on the widespread abuse by grooming gangs carried out on young people from the white British population; it is instructive to compare and contrast the modus operandi of the crimes against different victims. Indeed, there is reason to consider that, had concerns of the Sikh community been taken

seriously decades ago, 'lessons might have been learnt', to coin a phrase, regarding the abuse which subsequently came to light against white victims. As the report says, 'At the same time as the concerns of the Sikh community remain unaddressed, gangs of predominantly Pakistani men have been convicted of targeting young white females for sexual exploitation in cities across the United Kingdom. The common factor among these convictions is the utilisation of those techniques identified by the Sikh community thirty years earlier.'[\[2\]](#)

The RASE report is presented as an interim report only, and indeed more work needs to be done, but there is plenty of reason to think that the situation merits considerable attention. Allegations of widespread sexual exploitation of white girls by gangs were being made for years before any serious action was taken, and official reports and serious case reviews have identified various factors which led authorities, including the police, the social services, and local councils, to turn a blind eye to what was going on.[\[3\]](#) This in itself gives *prima facie* reason to wonder if the same may be true concerning the allegations in the RASE report.

However, at the same time as taking these allegations seriously, it's vital to be as precise and as rigorous as the evidence to date allows. Witness the attacks which have been levelled at the report into grooming gangs by the Quilliam Foundation, released in 2017.[\[4\]](#) The authors of this report admit that they were prompted to examine the issue out of scepticism about claims that 'Asian' men (a term widely used in Britain to indicate ethnic origins in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India or Sri Lanka) were disproportionately involved in the particular type of serious sexual offence that's come to be known as 'grooming'. Yet the report concluded that about 84% of the known offenders were in fact of Pakistani ethnicity.

([Maajid Nawaz](#) has stated more explicitly that the majority of perpetrators are not simply Pakistani, but Pakistani Muslims.) This figure has since been widely cited, and also widely criticised. There are indeed shortcomings in Quilliam's report. The report is unclear about how the researchers collected the data they used and how they analysed it. There are also difficulties in ascertaining the ethnicity and religion of perpetrators, and of victims.

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Many such shortcomings were recently highlighted in an extensive [series of tweets](#) by Dr Ella Cockbain of University College, London. The resulting firestorm is typical of the accusation and counter-accusation that dogs any attempt to have a reasonable discussion of these immensely serious matters in the UK today. Those who claim that the grooming of underage children in the UK by gangs is motivated by ethnic or religious factors are themselves likely to be charged with racism and/or 'Islamophobia'. Ella Cockbain argued in a paper published in 2013 that 'the current fixation with grooming and "Asian sex gangs" . . . further a political agenda and legitimise thinly veiled racism, ultimately doing victims a disservice' [\[5\]](#), and lately has [suggested](#) in a tweet, that Quilliam needs to push the idea of Muslim grooming crimes in order to justify its existence as a counter extremist organisation, a claim backed up by the organisation, [MEND](#). Dr Cockbain appears to me to be genuinely concerned to produce sound research in this area. But the chorus persistently humming 'racism' from both sides of the stage throughout the

entire drama is making it hard to follow the plot.

The RASE study conducted qualitative interviews which 'focused on harnessing the insight of victims, community activists and professionals alongside the experience of specialist staff who regularly work with young Sikh women experiencing sexual exploitation,' together with a review of already existing resources, although making clear that views expressed in the report represent those of the individuals involved and were not necessarily representative of wider groups. However, whilst noting the report's authors caution that this is an interim report only, the work done in interviewing a variety of sources may go some way to addressing the lacunae in evidence concerning 'grooming' offences until further work can be done.

Although having the support of some MPs, such as Sarah Champion (Labour, Rotherham), Tammanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour, Slough) and Preet Kaur Gill (Labour, Edgbaston), it remains to be seen what impact the report will have. We must hope that action is now taken. This should include looking at the factors that have served to hamper good research into the allegations in question, and at some of the consequences of how the authorities respond to allegations.

The report was produced by Sikh organisation themselves, taking six months to produce with input from a federation of Sikh organisations including S.M.A.R.T. (the Sikh Mediation and Rehabilitation Team) and [Sikh Youth UK](#). The Sikh community has an ethos of self-help, which is just as well, given that the authorities have proven reluctant to take their claims seriously. In tackling groomers, self-help can backfire, however, and there have been deleterious consequences not just

for Sikhs but for others who have acted to take matters into their own hands, as shall be explained below.

All too often, the Sikhs report, their allegations to the police that Sikh girls were being groomed by Muslim men were met with the official reaction that these girls were simply making a 'consensual lifestyle choice' to leave their families and their religion.' Such responses formed a regular focal point of Sikh community outrage which has continued through to the present day'.[\[6\]](#) At this point, the hairs on the back of one's head should be standing up. For where have we heard before that girls were making 'choices'? Report after report has found that victims of these gangs, some as young as eleven – yes, ELEVEN years old—were seen as making a 'lifestyle choice'[\[7\]](#). There have been repeated claims that underage white girls were making 'lifestyle choices' to work as 'child prostitutes.' As if, while some of their peers make 'lifestyle choices' to join the Girl Guides, to go to ballet school, or to hang out with friends listening to music and painting their nails, others make 'lifestyle choices' to lie on stinking mattresses in filthy rooms in godforsaken crevices of our towns and cities, while hundreds of men queue up to abuse them. Make the 'lifestyle choice' to get blind drunk or high on drugs so as not to be so aware of what was happening to them. Make the 'lifestyle choice' to return to their abusers out of fear of the threats that if they didn't, their mothers and sisters would be raped, their family's house would be set on fire, the child that they gave birth to after having been raped would be killed.

A Serious Case Review into child sexual exploitation in Oxford stated 'It was clear . . . through conversations with a range of professionals for this review . . . that there was little understanding of child sexual exploitation . . . there was

significant anxiety about their safety and well-being, but this tended to be focused on their home situation, the domestic violence they were living with and the lifestyles of their parents. The girls were labelled as promiscuous, at risk of prostitution, out of control and certainly not viewed as victims of CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation).’ [\[8\]](#)

The country has now by and large come to its senses and recognises that there is no such thing as a ‘child prostitute’—the term has been [scrubbed from the law](#), where it had appeared sixteen separate times in various pieces of legislation, in recognition that a child cannot ever consent to prostitution, and that such wording helped to mask child exploitation.

But nonetheless, victim blaming is still not far from the surface. The charity Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation ([Pace UK](#)) was set up originally in 1996 as CR0P, the Coalition for the Removal of Pimping, by [Irene Ivison](#) after her daughter was pimped out and murdered aged 17. Pace UK acts to support parents, working with a [relational safeguarding model](#) that puts the family at the centre of attempts to combat and prevent child sexual exploitation. Despite progress in attitudes, a [YouGov survey](#) commissioned by PACE UK in 2013 found some disturbing opinions prevail. 44% of professionals surveyed thought that, in most cases, parents were in part responsible for the sexual exploitation of their child, with a further 14% of ‘don’t knows’. And 6% thought that in most cases, the child or young person is in part responsible for their own sexual exploitation.

There is a close but complex link between attributions of choice and autonomy, and the blaming of victims and/or their

families. This plays out in different ways and may affect the Sikh community in distinct ways. Here's how it often seems to work. If choice is attributed to the victim, no crime is seen; nonetheless, if the behaviour is disapproved of by the authorities, the victim who has chosen this is denigrated, blamed for her choices, and her parents often vilified. If the behaviour is seen as acceptable by the authorities, parents who wish to prevent their child from making this 'choice' are also denigrated and blamed. However, if the victim is not seen to have made a choice, she is thus seen as in need of protection, protection which the parents have *ipso facto* 'failed to provide,' and the parents are blamed—notwithstanding the degree of determination and criminality of the perpetrators.

So, in broad brushstrokes: when young girls were seen by police and social services as having made a 'choice' to become prostitutes, no crime was noticed, the perpetrators got away with it, yet the girls themselves, and often their parents, were held in contempt. Once the attitudes started to shift, the young girls were seen as lacking agency, but often their parents were still viewed as inadequate for failing to prevent harm to their child; they are often blamed for not keeping sufficiently close control of their child. What many Sikh families seem to have found when they complain that their child has been subject to sexual exploitation and forced conversion appears to be the opposite; Sikhs say they are often seen by police and social services as overcontrolling, as trying to prevent their child's freedom, and as part of a 'conservative' and 'patriarchal' group.

How can these differences be explained? By looking at the complexities of the situation, at different and evolving techniques of exploitation, and at the ways in which, however

parents respond to their child's exploitation, it seems that someone must get the blame. I believe one key to understanding these issues is to understand that perpetrators are gaming the system, taking advantage of laws and regulations, and taking advantage of ways in which the systems put in place to protect children and victims may produce the reverse of the intended effects.

The RASE report talks of the ever-evolving techniques of the perpetrators. The focus on finding ways of blaming victims and their families deflects attention away from the extremely powerful manipulation that controls the minds and behaviours of victims. The term 'grooming' is often criticised for conjuring up a 'nice' image of hairdressers and fine attention to appearance, and for hence diverting attention away from the extreme violence and depravity that occurs. It is necessary not to forget the truly hideous nature of these crimes. But 'grooming' is used to capture the psychological mind control that perpetrators have over victims. And I think there is more. By gaming the system, by practising what is in essence a form of lawfare, by taking advantage of weaknesses in the responses of our authorities, the perpetrators are in many instances in effect grooming the entire system. What on earth are we doing imputing any blame on parents, families and communities? There is one group to blame. The perpetrators.

Media reports of child sexual exploitation by 'grooming gangs' often refer to the widespread abuse of 'white working class girls', even though some are clearly middle class; some have parents who own their own businesses or who are professionals.[\[9\]](#) I half suspect that describing victims as 'working class' and from 'the North of England' is a protective mechanism for middle-class London-based journalists who can't bear to think that it could possibly happen to their

own children. The reality is more complex. Girls from all different backgrounds have been targeted. The victims are repeatedly described as being 'vulnerable', which in some respects is tantamount to insinuating blame on those who should have made sure they were not vulnerable.

Media reports often focus on the abuse of girls in care homes. One might be left with the impression that these are girls who have been failed by their families. It is true that some sexually exploited girls come from chaotic or even abusive backgrounds; the perpetrators are opportunists, after all, and lions will always go for the weaker animals. What is less often explained is why many of these girls were placed in these homes: they were not groomed because they were in care homes; they were in care homes because they were groomed.

In some cases, parents have placed girls in care in the (sadly mistaken) belief that this will keep their child safer, or because they are at their wits' end trying to cope with the ramifications of the grooming which can have devastating effects on parents and on siblings. A recent report carried out by researchers at the University of Worcester, commissioned by Pace UK, examines the appalling consequences for parents' health, using interviews from affected families.[\[10\]](#) Imagine having to place buckets of water behind the front door every night out of fear that petrol would be poured through the letter box in the arson attacks threatened by abusers to keep their victims under control. Imagine a parent of two daughters going through this:

I'd have to get up and check they were all in their beds ...Yeah, and also yeah, I'd have to do a pillow sweep. I don't know if you've done pillow sweeps. Where they're in

bed and they're asleep, but you have to do a pillow sweep underneath just to check there's no knives there because they used to take knives to bed to protect themselves.[\[11\]](#)

And indeed, Harminder Kaur also told me, 'The effects on parents is quite horrific, some fathers had heart attacks. They were on their own, the police had no interest or didn't know how to deal with it.'

More sinisterly, some girls end up in care homes because their groomers encourage them to report their families for abuse. A [key strategy](#) of all groomers is to separate their target victim from family and peers. It is literally child's play to turn a young person against their parents. Far from the stereotype that all victims come from 'bad' families where parents have no concern for what their child is doing, it may be the very structure and discipline that parents provide that is then used against them: 'If your parents really loved you as I do, they would realise you are an adult now and let you do X, Y, or Z', the abusers persuasively urge. Or they may encourage allegations of sexual abuse within the family. If a child alleges that her father is abusing her, the authorities have a statutory duty to intervene and the child will be removed from the home. Very rarely, in extreme cases, a child may be placed in a secure institution where it is extremely difficult to leave. But care homes have become notorious for the ease with which perpetrators may access children. Those working with victims have long recognised this strategy of persuading girls to make allegations against their parents. The RASE report claims that this strategy is also used against Sikh girls. There is no reason to consider this not to be the case.

The system for dealing with child sexual abuse was designed to deal with abuse within the family which is indeed still the most common form. But this can mean official responses simply play into the hands of the perpetrators, and responses seem geared up towards casting some degree of blame on parents. Some families may find their children taken away with frightening ease; indeed, one especially troubling aspect of this national tragedy is that some of the victims have given birth as a result of their sexual exploitation, and then had their children taken away by social services. But [middle-class families](#) can find that they beg for help but are dismissed on the assumption that because they have a nice house and two cars, and send their kids to violin lessons, of course they can cope; far from the experience of some families of having social services poke their nose into every corner of their lives, the social workers can't be seen for dust. And once the attention is on the parents as being somehow in the wrong, for being too controlling, or for being not controlling enough, there is less, or no, attention on the perpetrators. Given what happens to desperate families in the mainstream population, claims made in the RASE report of responses to Sikh complaints are entirely plausible.

The blame game has endless variations. Single parent families are blamed for not being able to keep an eye on all their children at once (overlooking the fact that this is so for any family where parents are outnumbered). Some families are excoriated for being dysfunctional families where no adult is working. Families where parents work are blamed for being out at work instead of keeping an eye on their children. Harminder Kaur told me that Sikh families, who are traditionally very hard working, were often blamed for not being at home to supervise children: 'All Sikh fathers and mothers would be working in those days with an exception to few women who were housewives. Women worked in textiles manufacturing as well as

other heavy-duty work. The second generation learnt the discipline and work ethics of their parents and progressed on to setting their own businesses or further studying.' Yet perpetrators have endless techniques for navigating parental controls. They simply evolve to fit the circumstances of the children and young people they are targeting.

The RASE report describes another familiar pattern. In response to the failings of authorities, parents and communities are often driven to take their own action. In the absence of police response, parents have often resorted to collecting evidence about their child's exploitation, such as taking down car registration numbers, or even following their child and taking photographs for evidence. The group [Parents Against Grooming](#) (PAG) of concerned and affected parents was set up in Rochdale in 2012. Its activities include a Parks Watch service to patrol and monitor areas where grooming is known to occur. But some attempts to combat exploitation have been met with negative reactions. Fathers who have gone to find their daughters and bring them back from their abusers have on occasion been arrested for their efforts.[\[12\]](#)

In the case of the Sikhs, in response to the failure of the police to act on allegations of child sexual exploitation, the group Shere Punjab (lion of the Punjab) was formed in the 1980s to target the gangs of alleged abusers. This included having meetings the police, and standing outside schools to confront abusers who gathered at the school gates to target children. But episodes of violence occurred in direct confrontation with gangs, and many members were arrested as a result. One episode famously involved the Moghul Durbar restaurant in Leicester where Sikhs alleged that a Sikh girl was being abused. [Seven Sikhs were jailed](#) for conspiracy to commit violent disorder in April 2013. The court heard the men

'mistakenly believed men responsible for an attack on a girl were at the restaurant'. However, by wild coincidence, in August 2013, [six men were jailed](#) for child prostitution offences against a girl who was abused at various locations, including the Moghul Durbar restaurant in Leicester.

Whilst not condoning vigilantism, given the scale of sexual exploitation, the depth of the depravity involved, and the inadequate responses of the authorities, it is somewhat surprising to me that there have not been more of such attacks across Britain. If police cannot or will not tackle the problem, what can be expected? And it seems very much as if the police are overwhelmed. Take Rotherham. This small town in the North of England, which has become notorious for sexual exploitation, had a population of 257 000 in the 2011 census. It has an estimated 1500 victims of child sexual exploitation. The [National Crime Agency](#) is currently investigating 426 grooming gang members from Rotherham alone. To date, a mere 13 people from Rotherham have been tried and convicted for these crimes. You do the maths. It's not good. How many years of court time will it take to deal with all the offenders? Perpetrators can readily work out that they will probably get away scot free.

Moreover, whilst awaiting proper investigation and research, it's inevitable that some people will do their own preliminary statistical analysis. Given that, notwithstanding the difficulties of finding out what's really going on, it is frequently reported that 'grooming gangs' consist predominantly of men of Pakistani Muslim background, here's how some amateur maths might work out. 3.7% of the [Rotherham population](#) are Muslim. Roughly half of them are male. That makes about 4700 Muslim males. Some grooming gang members are not Muslim. But then, many of those 4700 males will be too

young to be perpetrators. Some people are now estimating that approximately 10% of the male Muslim population of Rotherham are being investigated for grooming offences.

Of course, 90% are presumably not being investigated, so this backs up the repeatedly made provisos that not all from this community are involved in these offences; of course these hastily drawn back-of-the-envelope calculations may be wildly inaccurate. But one must start to wonder, *how inaccurate?* It's no use complaining that people should not jump to conclusions, because we are not talking about parking offences or minor anomalies on tax returns, we are talking about child rape. Naturally, people will be forming their own conclusions, even if these turn out to be erroneous. This only underlines the urgency of adequate police and judicial responses and really thorough research into this question, both out of concern for the victims and concern not to stereotype unfairly the Muslim Pakistani community.

The activities of groups such as Shere Punjab have often been described simply as stemming from conflict between Muslim and Sikh communities. Newspaper reports historically certainly gave this impression. The RASE report itself describes historical conflicts between Muslims and Sikhs, as part of the background to the allegations of sexual exploitation. One thing we see here again, is how responses to sexual exploitation by parents or others in the community, leads to denigration of those associated with alleged victims. This in turn then feeds into official denial of the problem, and turns attention away from trying to address the circumstances of the victims. The existence of animosity between two groups might mean that one should take extra care in forming conclusions, but it does not necessarily mean that one group is not targeting the other.

Sikh allegations of targeted sexual exploitation and forced conversion of young Sikh women have even been attributed to a distinctively Sikh form of 'Islamophobia', and hence dismissed as an attempt to paint Muslims as a kind of 'folk devil'.[\[13\]](#) In the absence of good data and research on the truth of what is happening in our towns, cities, our streets and our homes, the door is open to the kind of academic argument that 'narratives' are being constructed by the media of a 'racial crime threat'.[\[14\]](#) This may be true. But it would be worse if an actual crime threat was being dismissed as nothing other than 'Islamophobia'. It can be true that accounts of allegations display a certain prejudice, even while there is some truth to those allegations. But further than it has this been claimed by Dr Katy Sian, a sociologist currently based at York University, that the Sikh allegations of grooming have 'been persistently reproduced to warn "vulnerable" Sikh "girls" about the "dangers" of "predatory" Muslim men, a tale that has become deeply embedded within the Sikh imagination, a myth that continues to resurface within the public eye, readily consumed by the diaspora'.[\[15\]](#) In a video of the launch for her book, *Unsettling Sikh and Muslim conflict: mistaken identities, forced conversions, and postcolonial formations*,[\[16\]](#) Dr Sian appears to smile and even to laugh when describing Sikh accounts of girls being groomed and taken to Pakistan for prostitution.[\[17\]](#) Personally, I found this extremely disturbing. Even if such accounts are indeed entirely 'myth', this is no laughing matter.

Dr Sian claims that there is a lack of evidence to back up Sikh 'cautionary tales' about grooming. But there are documented allegations and convictions. Even if exaggerated, these claims undoubtedly have some foundation and merit serious investigation. The RASE report interviewed affected parties. The [Sikh Awareness Society](#) (SAS) which has been

operating since 1998 likewise claims to work with affected individuals. Their website states, 'Under common Punjabi mentality, these issues are still considered 'taboo' and are rarely addressed by the Gurdwara Sahibs, and Sikh community leaders. Therefore the victims of this hate-crime tend to suffer in silence.' Their efforts to combat this include a 24-hour confidential telephone service and out-reach programmes including training to spot the signs and combat grooming and abuse. The SAS also state that they work to document these matters. Is this all fabricated?

Dr Sian's scepticism about "'vulnerable" Sikh "girls"' may refer to Sikh allegations that girls over the age of 16, including freshers at university, are targeted. In the eyes of the law, anyone over 18 is an adult, and the age of consent to sexual activity in the UK is 16. Here we have another example of how groomers target different individuals and take advantage of the law. Most of the successful prosecutions for such sexual exploitation concern offences committed when the victim was under 16, as in law, consent to sex is impossible for this age group. But the RASE report suggests that there may be a distinctive pattern of grooming for Sikh girls, and argues that the law and the authorities should recognise at least three different forms of grooming crime.

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The clearest cases are where the victims are under 16. A second category which should be recognised is where the

grooming process begins under the age of 16, yet does not progress to sexual activity until over the age of 16. A vanishing trick—no crime to see here! Yet if the psychological and emotional grip of grooming has already started, the reality would be that free and fully informed ‘consent’ to sex is absent. The problem of course, is proving this. A third category is that of vulnerable adults.

Currently, the age of 16 to 18 presents a period of particular vulnerability to young people under British law. Although social services can still take protective steps, often little or nothing is done, and it can often seem as if time is just ticking by until the young person turns 18. UK law has recently recognised the offence of ‘[coercive control](#),’ but taking forward a prosecution relies upon a complaint by the victim, which is not likely to be forthcoming in cases of the mind control exerted in grooming.

We are back to considering the attribution of consent, and responses to this. The law has to draw clear lines. But the reality cannot be that emotional maturity with regard to sexual choices is finally and fully achieved on the stroke of midnight on one’s sixteenth birthday. However, parents and communities who consider young people over the age of 16 to still be vulnerable and in need of protection and guidance, are themselves vulnerable to being seen as overly controlling, regressive, or of failing to keep up with modern sensibilities. This appears to be the case with regard to Sikh complaints of the targeting of young Sikhs.

One reason then, why there may be a lack of evidence regarding the grooming of Sikhs, is that in many cases, no ‘crime’ recognised in UK law has been committed. One of the many

strategies of groomers could then well be to tip toe inside the boundaries of the law. This has the added advantage that when parents complain to authorities, they are seen to be the problem, not the groomers who are merely victims of community hostility. Hey presto—another weapon in the lawfare armoury.

Indeed, there is an important discussion to be had about how the offences of 'grooming' are to be understood and recorded. The Sikhs have been told that data is needed to back up their claims. But if something is not recognised as a crime, it's unlikely to be recorded. Moreover, official UK statistics do not recognise 'Sikh' as a distinct ethnic group. It may be recorded under 'religion', but it is not mandatory that religious group is recorded. Hence, there are no official statistics that could back up the claim that Sikh victims were being targeted, let alone that Sikh victims were being targeted by Muslim perpetrators. Sikhs have been arguing the case for years to include Sikh as an ethnic identity on official documentation and in the UK census, with no success. So, no wonder there is no firm data to back up the Sikh's claims. In the absence of greater knowledge of these offences, and how they relate to other forms of child sexual abuse, there exists the danger of inaccuracy, of exaggeration, and then of counter claim.

Sajid Javid, the Home Secretary, has [ordered research](#) into all forms of child sexual abuse, including examining the characteristics of grooming gangs. He has said, 'My officials have been working with investigating officers in relevant cases, and with the National Crime Agency, to establish the particular characteristics and contexts associated with this type of offending. We are looking at what this data set can tell us about the characteristics of offenders, victims and the wider context of abuse; all of which have critical bearing

on the effective targeting of prevention activity.’ I hope his task force notes the serious concerns about how comprehensive, accurate and informative the data set is. It will be necessary to understand these offences more thoroughly, in order to know how to classify and record them. Hence, we must not be held back from researching them by the lack of an adequate classification and recording system. Javid should also be braced for the almost [inevitable attacks](#) launched at anyone who ever murmurs about the possibility of a problem linked to members of a particular community.

The RASE report argues that features of the Sikh community, and of their relationship to the Muslim community, help to explain the sexual abuse of young Sikhs and the unhelpful responses of authorities. The crimes of child sexual exploitation are crimes that affect not just immediate victims, but their families and communities who can be seen as secondary victims, and who are also often victimised or stigmatised by the responses of the authorities, in ways which the actions of the groomers may provoke, sometimes seemingly even by calculation. The background community of the groomers begs to be investigated, especially as one characteristic element of the gangs frequently seen is that members have pre-existing connections to each other, may work together, and often are related by ties of blood or marriage. Those who deny that there is a problem within certain communities in UK also have every reason to wish for such investigations. It will not do to ignore this and to carry on casting aspersions on those individuals, families, and communities who have been saying, for decades, that lives are being blighted all over Britain.

[1] *The Religiously Aggravated Sexual Exploitation of Young Sikh Women Across the UK*, S.M.A.R.T. in conjunction with Sikh Youth UK, 2018, <http://smartcentreproject.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/RASE-Report-Sikh-Mediation-and-Rehabilitation-Team.pdf>

[2] op. cit, p. 8

[3] See e.g. the *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997 – 2013*, Alexis Jay OBE, 2014 (the Jay Report), https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent_inquiry_cse_in_rotherham